

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
DISTRICT DIRECTOR
P. O. BOX 2505
CINCINNATI, OH 45201

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Date: JUL 21 1997

A HAND UP INC

Sharon L. Durbin
A Hand Up, Inc. TM
500 S. 27th St. A-16
Decatur, IL 62521

66104

Employer Identification Number:
36-4133952
OLN:
17053165045007
Contact Person:
D. A. DOWNING
Contact Telephone Number:
(513) 241-5199
Accounting Period Ending:
December 31
Foundation Status Classification:
509(a)(2)
Advance Ruling Period Begins:
April 8, 1997
Advance Ruling Period Ends:
December 31, 2001
Addendum Applies:
No

Dear Applicant:

Based on information you supplied, and assuming your operations will be as stated in your application for recognition of exemption, we have determined you are exempt from federal income tax under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code as an organization described in section 501(c)(3).

Because you are a newly created organization, we are not now making a final determination of your foundation status under section 509(a) of the Code. However, we have determined that you can reasonably expect to be a publicly supported organization described in section 509(a)(2).

Accordingly, during an advance ruling period you will be treated as a publicly supported organization, and not as a private foundation. This advance ruling period begins and ends on the dates shown above.

Within 90 days after the end of your advance ruling period, you must send us the information needed to determine whether you have met the requirements of the applicable support test during the advance ruling period. If you establish that you have been a publicly supported organization, we will classify you as a section 509(a)(1) or 509(a)(2) organization as long as you continue to meet the requirements of the applicable support test. If you do not meet the public support requirements during the advance ruling period, we will classify you as a private foundation for future periods. Also, if we classify you as a private foundation, we will treat you as a private foundation from your beginning date for purposes of section 507(d) and 4940.

Grantors and contributors may rely on our determination that you are not a private foundation until 90 days after the end of your advance ruling period. If you send us the required information within the 90 days, grantors and contributors may continue to rely on the advance determination until we make a final determination of your foundation status.

If we publish a notice in the Internal Revenue Bulletin stating that we

Letter 1045 (DO/CG)



**Wally
Spiers**

Exchanging aid for work

In her 18 years with Illinois Power Co., Sharon Durbin has had her share of frustration in working with customers who consistently can't pay their bills.

She thought there must be something better. So Durbin, a customer relations manager for Illinois Power Co., designed a work donation program that lets people donate time to the community in return for help with their utility, food and rent bills.

"It's a winning strategy for everyone involved," Durbin said.

People prefer to help themselves by donating work and community organizations get some essential volunteer work done, she said.

"I have come in contact with many needs, wants and demands of customers with utility bills," Durbin said. "I have worked with agencies to help customers obtain funds to pay their past due utility bills, money for rent and food. Through this concept I have seen success stories."

Durbin has scheduled a meeting to discuss the concept of donating community service time in exchange for payment with local agencies, churches and other service groups at 10:30 a.m. Dec. 4 at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 6325 W. Main St. in Maryville.

"We sent out about 200 invitations in Madison County," she said. "Responses are starting to trickle in. We hope for a big turnout."

Durbin used to run a similar program in Montgomery County until she relocated to the metro-east about a year ago.

"I have used it in my job to help people," she said. "Illinois Power is letting me put the time and effort into it."

"I've been here long enough to see that the area could benefit from the same concept. So I decided to step into the water, so to speak, and try and coordinate the efforts," she said.

Participants can do community service work and receive \$5 an hour for up to 99 hours. The money is then sent to designated landlords, cities or utilities to cover bills.

Instead of just giving money away, charitable organizations can get public service work for their money.

Durbin said there are several ways the program could be run, including creation of a board of directors and a nonprofit corporation, creating a one-stop agency within the company or creating a community-based thrift store.

The basis for the program is work done for help received.

"This is not a handout program," she said. "If a community knows that the donations they are giving are staying home and can see the benefits in the community, it helps people become involved."

Durbin said that in her experience she has seen that many people prefer to be able to give something for the assistance they get. But setting up a program will take a lot of work and a lot of community involvement.

"It will take a lot of getting the word out," she said. "That is what makes it work."

For more information, call Durbin at (800) 873-5848, Ext. 6133.

☆☆☆

If you have any ideas for a column, call Wally Spiers at (618) 234-1000, Ext. 506.

Up Front

EDITED BY ROBERT McNATT

CAMPAIGN 2000

THAT TIDAL WAVE OF COMPASSION

IT'S HIS CAMPAIGN MANTRA: George W. Bush = Compassionate Conservative. He repeats it so often you'd think he coined the phrase. Think again.



COMPASSION FEVER: Bush, Dole, and Bush all caught the bug

One of Bush's rivals for the Republican Presidential nomination, Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, first used the term in 1981. "I'm a conservative, and proud of it, but I'm a compassionate conservative," Hatch told *The New York Times* after saving the Jobs Corps from the Reagan budget knife.

In the nearly two interven-

ing decades, a parade of right-of-center pols or their handlers have attempted to soften their images by invoking the catchy phrase. Among them: Newt Gingrich (1989), televangelist Pat Robertson (1988), both Bob Dole (1987) and Elizabeth Dole (1997), House Speaker Dennis Hastert (1986), former Hous-



ing & Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp (repeatedly), and ex-Representative Robert "B-1 Bob" Dornan (1995).

The label was even attached to the first George Bush. Back in 1987, the then-Vice-President's media consultant Roger Ailes, now CEO of Fox News, told the *Times*: "George Bush is a conservative and a compassionate man. There's nothing mutually exclusive about it." Seems that George W. is indeed a chip off the old block. *Richard S. Dunham*

THE LIST WHO BRINGS HOME THE SHEEPSKIN?

As their participation in the workforce has increased, women have also become better educated than men. Since 1982, they have earned more bachelor's degrees than men. And by 1996, according to this recent study, women earned a majority of the BAs awarded in every state of the union except Utah. Women increased their share of degrees from both public and private schools. Of 17 broad academic disciplines, these are the fields that have seen

the largest increase in the percentage of women getting undergraduate degrees:

	1970	1996
PSYCHOLOGY	43.4%	73.0%
COMMUNICATIONS	35.3	58.8
BIOLOGY/LIFE SCIENCES	29.7	52.7
BUSINESS	8.7	48.6
AGRICULTURE	4.2	36.8
ARCHITECTURE	5.3	36.1
PHYSICAL SCIENCES	13.6	35.9

DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS/THE COLLEGE BOARD

TALK SHOW "You can choose either kidney. Buyer pays all transplant and medical costs. Of course only one for sale, as I need the other to live."

— "hchero," who attempted to auction his own kidney on the eBay Web site

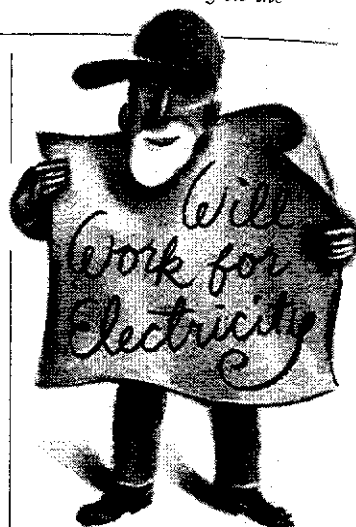
POINTS OF LIGHT

KEEPING THE HOME FIRES BURNING

IT'S HARD TO GET WARM AND fuzzy about the unsavory realm of bill collecting. But a new program funded by Illinois Power and the state of Illinois has pumped some dogood vibes into the way low-income customers pay off their debts. Now, that program is looking to go national.

A Hand Up, based in Decatur, Ill., allows customers to pay off overdue bills by volunteering at one of 85 local nonprofit outfits, such as thrift shops or housing authorities. For each hour's work, A Hand Up wipes away \$10 of debt owed to the utility, landlord, or other creditor. "The philosophy is to help them help themselves out of a crisis," says founder Sharon Durbin, a former Illinois Power customer-service rep who for years fielded calls from desperate billpayers.

Launched in 1998, A Hand Up has attracted 1,000 par-



ticipants so far. The group says it decided to go national after other utilities as far afield as Tennessee, Vermont, New York, and California contacted it. It wants to begin the national rollout in spring, 2000. "It's a stepping stone toward a real job," says Sandra Hurd, a laid-off casino worker in Collinsville, Ill., who received help through A Hand Up. Hey, maybe bill-collecting can be sort of warm and fuzzy after all. *Dennis Berman*

FOOD STUFF

A SAUCY LITTLE COMPANY HITS IT BIG

JAPANESE COMPANIES HAVE traditionally looked to foreign markets for success. Yet while carmakers and consumer-electronics outfits struggle for the U.S. dollar, one unheralded company has hit it big. Kikkoman is making a killing in soy sauce, thanks to Americans' changing tastes.

Americans consumed some 40 million gallons of soy sauce last year, and the market has grown steadily for the past 25 years at a 10% annual clip. That's benefited Kikkoman, which specializes in naturally brewed soy sauce. Its main American rivals, such as La Choy, make

chemically manufactured brands—a different market segment, say analysts. "There is little competition in the American market," for Kikkoman, says Yasuo Ariga, food industry analyst at Crédit Lyonnais Securities (Japan).

Half of Kikkoman's \$42.6 million operating profits in the first half of 1999 came from the U.S., a big part of the expected 15% rise in net income for this year. Sales of \$2.1 billion annually, are expected to grow 5% this year. So far, none of the 2,000 other Japanese soy sauce makers have made a big push in the U.S. But when they sniff the sweet scent of the lucrative market, they could inundate the country with new soy sauce brands. *Miki Tanikawa*





OFFICE OF PUBLIC UTILITIES
CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

KAREN HASARA, MAYOR

GENERAL OFFICE

July 18, 2000

Mr. Wayne Curtis, Chief
Office of Human Services
Department of Commerce and Community Affairs
620 East Adams Street
Springfield, IL 62701

Dear Mr. Curtis:

This is a letter of enthusiastic support for the assistance program, A Hand Up, and a request for its continued funding from the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs.

City Water, Light and Power began participating in A Hand Up in February 2000. Our experience through only four months can only be termed a success. About 150 customers have enrolled in the work program or G.E.D. classes. Several customers avoided electric service disconnection and others had service restored. Moreover, through May, CWLP had received \$9,335.35 in payments for customers who had completed the program. But in my opinion, the most important statistic is this: 17 previously unemployed customers were hired into full-time jobs as a result of the work program. And many others are learning the skills needed to become employed.

A Hand Up is the only low-income assistance program that I have seen that promotes self-sufficiency. Through education and training, participants in the program can acquire the skills to have success at work. Continued funding from DCCA will move more people off welfare.

Last year, participating utilities were not required to provide a contribution for administrative costs. Although CWLP is nearly halfway through its fiscal year, we are willing to commit \$10,000 for administrative support in state fiscal year 2001.

We hope that this commitment and the program's tremendous success will help obtain continued state funding. A Hand Up works. Please contact me at 789-2116 x520 if you need any further information.

Sincerely,

Phillip M. Gonet
General Manager

PMG:pkb

Cy: Sharon Durbin
Illinois Power Co.
500 South 27th Street, A-16
Decatur, IL 62521-2200

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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VOL. CIII NO. 71 CE/HL ★ ★ ★

TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 1999

INTERNET ADDRESS: <http://wsj.com>

Work Week

**A Special News Report About Life:
On the Job — and Trends
Taking Shape There**

A UTILITY puts delinquent customers to work to pay off their bills.

In a program started by Illinois Power, a unit of Decatur-based Illinova Corp., customers with unpaid bills can sign up to work at nonprofit organizations like thrift shops. In lieu of salaries, the customers get up to \$600 of past-due household bills paid from donations Illinois Power collects from church and civic groups. The program also pays delinquent bills if customers complete a high-school equivalency exam.

When Sandy Hurd signed up for "A Hand Up," she owed \$178 on her electricity bill and needed car repairs. After completing the work-donation program, she was hired by the thrift store where she had volunteered and has since stayed current on her bills. "I haven't been late yet," she says.

A Hand Up nominated for Green Thumb award

DECATUR — A Hand Up Inc., a nonprofit agency started in Decatur by Illinois Power Co. and administered through Green Thumb, has been nominated for a national Green Thumb award for Outstanding Community Service Project of 1997-1998.

A Hand Up was started to help those who were unable to pay power bills. Now it solicits donations and funding from civic groups, individuals and businesses to support service projects

needed in the community.

Individuals with financial obligations can come to A Hand Up, which operates at the Mission Thrift Store, 1025 N. Water St.

Green Thumb enrollee and community service coordinator Betty Green then connects them with community assignments. Once the community service work is completed, A Hand Up mails a check on behalf of the individual directly to pay rent, medical or utility bills.

Goodwill Industries
313 E. Main Street,
Galesburg, IL 61401

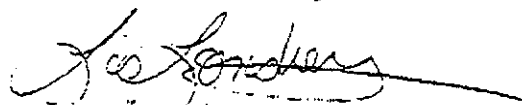
Dear Ms. Scott

I would like to take this opportunity to let you know how pleased I am with the "Hands Up Program". Although I was apprehensive in the onset, I must say that I am extremely pleased with how well your clients have worked out for us.

We have been able to get many things accomplished thanks to the hard work of your clients. They have proven to be enthusiastic willing workers.

Thankyou again for the opportunity.

Yours sincerely,


Lis Lonsberry
Manager

July 12, 2000

Hand Up, Inc.
Ref: Ms. Kristi Durbin

Dear Sir/Ms:

I recently completed a work program initiated by Ms. Kristi Durbin. I wish to briefly address both the program and Ms. Durbin.

Many agencies tend to treat applicants/recipients as criminals, or second-class citizens. In the vast majority of cases the applicant has found himself/herself in an undesirable financial condition beyond their control.

In my case, I was treated with great respect and professionalism. Frankly, I was surprised, having expected to be treated as a "beggar." Ms. Durbin talked "to" me, not "at" me....or worse, down to me.

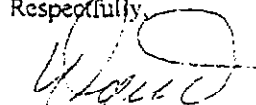
She is to be commended for her professionalism, pleasant attitude and prompt attention to detail.

It is my fervent hope I never have to avail myself of your services again. However, should that ever occur, it is a feeling of relief knowing that a helpful person such as Ms. Durbin will be available to lend help and support.

She is a positive reflection of your Agency. Please convey my heartfelt "Thanks" to her.

I wish to say "Thank You" to your Agency as well for being there when I needed you.

Respectfully,



David Eaton
Taylorville, IL.

December 12, 2000

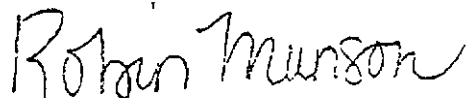
Sally Scott
Hands Up Inc.
235 East Main Street
Galesburg, IL 61401

Dear Sally:

I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to work with the Hands Up program. This has been a great benefit for me and my daughter. I have always prided myself on being very independent and paying my own way. Working for the Hands Up program has allowed me to keep my sense of pride and still pay off my power bill. Everyone I worked for was very helpful.

Again, I am very thankful for this opportunity and hope others that are in need will be able to benefit from this program.

Sincerely,



Robin Munson



TO: A HANDS UP PROGRAM
FROM: VITA S. HAWTHORNE
TO: MS. BETTY GREEN AND THE
 STAFF

GREETINGS UNTO YOU, I WOULD LIKE TO
TAKE THE TIME TO SAY THANK-YOU FOR
YOUR HELP IN FINDING WORK FOR ME TO
DO SO THAT MY FAMILY AND I WOULD NOT
BE LEFT IN THE COLD AND DARK. I WAS
NOT WORKING AND MY HUSBAND LEFT ME
OWING A LARGE POWER BILL TO ILLINOIS
POWER AND I HAVE BEEN VERY SICK AND I
AM ON OXYGEN AT NIGHT AND HAD IT
NOT BEEN FOR BETTY GREEN AND THE
STAFF HELPING ME OUT I WOULD HAVE
HAD A BREAKDOWN AND NOT BEEN ABLE
TO FUNCTION. THANK-YOU SO MUCH FOR
YOUR HELP AND LOVE FOR PEOPLE AND I
KNOW THAT GOD WILL BLESS ALL OF YOU
THAT HELP PEOPLE, THAT RUN INTO HARD
TIMES IN THE YEAR.. MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND THANK-YOU FOR A CHANCE FOR ME
TO WORK AND KEEP ELECTRIC IN OUR
HOME!

Montgomery County **The News**

Self-Help Program Developed Here Being Promoted In Madison County

by Richard Slepicka

MARYVILLE - "Helping people help themselves," is how Sharon Durbin, customer relations manager for Illinois Power in Maryville, describes the philosophy of the program she is working to promote in Madison County. The program, developed while working in Hillsboro and put into reality with the Salvation Army store in Hillsboro, is built around a concept called "work donation."

Durbin, with the blessing of her company, has now brought together a team of diverse service agencies and organizations in Madison County to form a not-for-profit corporation called "A Hand Up."

Their purpose is to start thrift stores and use the proceeds to support the self-help program. In the program, an individual performs community service to work off debts. For each hour of community service, for example, a pledge is made of \$10. After the number of hours of community service are given, a check is mailed to the vendor from the non-profit corporation for that individual's debt. The vendor

can be a utility, landlord, city services, etc.

Durbin describes it as a program that gives a person "a hand up, not a hand out."

She said that several years ago, as part of her work with Illinois Power, she saw that one particular family was continually having their power cutoff and later, having to get it turned back on. "I got several churches and other groups to each donate some money. The man worked hard doing different community service jobs that I had lined up to earn his pay. From this he gained confidence and demonstrated he could do good work. A couple weeks after he finished with us, he had a job. He came back later and thanked me for helping him get out of the welfare hole he had been in,"

Continued Page 9

Helping Hand

from front page

Durbin said. "A lot of ideas came out of that experience for me, too."

Over a period of four years, over 50 individuals "worked off" utility, rent and water bills. Most of the pay for those individuals came from money made at the Salvation Army store in Hillsboro.

To complement the process of "A Hand Up," the coalition of agencies and organizations in Madison county, as is being done here, will work with the individual to get him or her additional job skills training and educational opportunities. This process will encourage long-term resolutions for individuals rather than short-term ones, Durbin added.

Durbin developed the program in Montgomery County and was later transferred to Madison County by Illinois Power. She talked to the company and seeing the great potential in the program, IP has told her to make it her job to work to implement the program in her new territory. The company, too, sees the program as a way to help restore dignity to individuals and recycle benefits into the community.

On Wednesday, Durbin led a group of more than 30 people from Madison County through the Salvation Army Thrift Store and showed them the work being done to build a shelter for battered women.

Besides the work being done, they were most impressed with the spirit of volunteerism.

To Sharon,

12-8-00

If it wasn't for you and all the others on the hands-up program, I wouldn't have had a chance to get my GED. So I'm very glad to know and to have all of you as my friends. So I, just wanted to write you a real big thank you. I believe the hands-up program is a great deal, to be involved in. You have really been there for me in these last few months. The program has helped me in so many ways. They have helped me to gain self confidence in myself. To make me believe I can do any thing, I want if I work hard enough. Also they have been around when you really need a friend, ~~like~~ like when my father passed away. So I would really like to praise all of the ones that have helped me (but there are two I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart. That is Sharon who came all the way from her job, to meet me and to sign me up. Then there is Sandy who also came all the way to SIC to meet with me. Also there are no better friend than Sharon and Sandy. There is no better program than the hands-up program.

Thank You
Brenda Tarrence
Your friend

January 1, 2001

Sharon Durbin
Springfield, IL

Dear Sharon,

I want to take this time to thank you for taking the time to help people help themselves. I know a program like this takes more time & effort than most people know. There are stressful times & a lot of times people don't take the time to say "Thank you." The Bible says one in ten, in the healing of the lepers, ten healed & only one took the time to say "thank you".

I started working with you August, 1998 through Green Thumb. There really aren't words to express how I feel about the job, and what it means to me. How many people can say "it's Monday & I get to go to work" instead of dreading to go to work? I see the changes the program has made in lives, given them back their self esteem, some have found jobs, & others have furthered their education.

There are always those who will just use the system, & that troubles me, that's when I put into remembrance that God is the only person in the position to judge or look down on anyone.

A Hand Up is more than a job to me. I remember when I first started and was working and taking computer classes. I was tired, and at times I felt like my brain was on overload and ready to explode. Guess what? That's when I would come to work & find my boss had left a very encouraging message on my voice mail. Believe me you don't find many bosses like that. You are one of a kind, keep up the good work, and keep on caring. You have made a difference to many. A Hand Up can't change all the people, but we can make a difference one at a time.

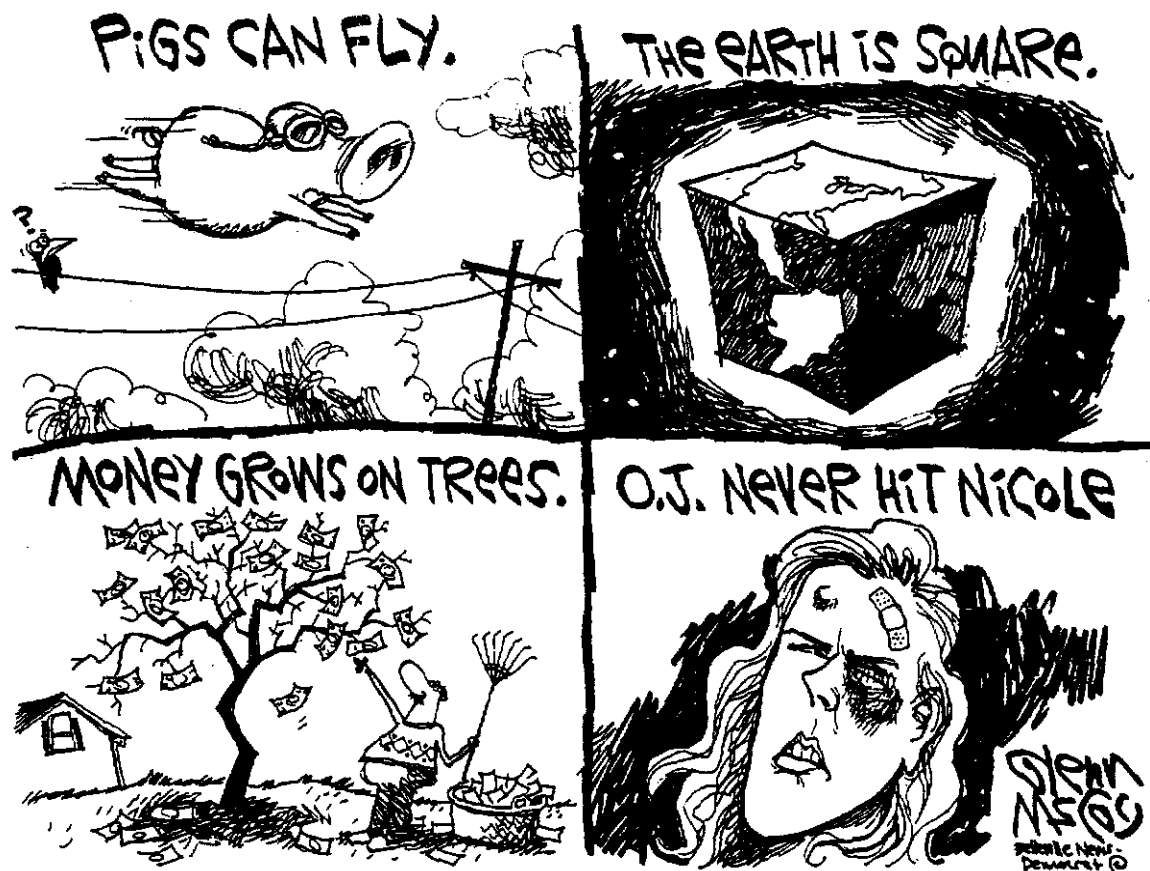
God bless you in the New Year.

Sincerely,

Betty J. Green

Betty J. Green

OPINIONS



Our viewpoint

Bellville Area News
1996

A hand up

Most people agree that giving someone a hand up is more helpful in the long run than a handout. That is why we think Sharon Durbin's plan for a work for assistance program in Madison County holds a lot of promise.

Durbin, a customer relations manager for Illinois Power, is holding an organizational meeting next Wednesday for the program. Simply stated, the idea is to have people perform community service in exchange for financial help from churches, community service groups and other organizations. People would earn \$5 an hour for the work they do, and that money would be sent to directly pay for rent, food or utilities.

As Durbin found running a similar program in Montgomery County, work for assistance benefits both the charities that take part and the individuals they help. The charities, instead of simply giving money away, can receive needed services in

exchange. The individuals receiving assistance have a chance to pay their own way. Not only is that good for their dignity but it may help them develop needed job skills. Durbin said one family she worked with had been on Public Aid for more than six years. The program gave the father the confidence to get back into the work force.

As our nation moves to limit welfare benefits, it is important that we find more ways to help people help themselves. The government has tried with programs such as AmeriCorps and YouthBuild, but they have proved so expensive that any benefits are quickly lost in the cost.

Private efforts like this one, with low overhead and less red tape, have a better chance of success.

Durbin invited 200 groups to the organizational meeting at 10:30 a.m. Dec. 4 at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Maryville. We encourage those invited to attend and explore the possibilities.

Empowering the economically disadvantaged

Thrift store employees work to pay off delinquent household bills

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DECATUR, Ill. — Rebecca Smith trusted her daughter to pay their power bills.

Instead, she ended up in a dark house owing \$1,209 to Illinois Power and paralyzed with fear about how she would ever pay it off.

Smith started to dig herself out of that debt last week — by working three days a week at the Water Street Mission thrift shop in a program sponsored by Illinois Power.

Smith earns \$10 an hour, but all the money goes directly toward her utility bill. She can shave up to \$600 off the bill that way.

"I think people like me will benefit from this program. I'm chipping away at that bill," said Smith, straightening clothes on hangers and propping up stuffed animals up as she talked. "It's a blessing."

Offering options

The program was the brainchild of Sharon Durbin, who worked for 20 years in Illinois Power's customer service department.

She found herself frustrated with the limited options available as she worked with low-income customers seeking to get their delinquent bills paid off and their power turned back on.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A shopper who declined to give her name departs the Water Street Mission thrift shop in Decatur, Ill. The store has joined a program designed by Illinois Power Co., where the store hires people who work to pay off delinquent power bills. The goal of Illinois Power is to have the program established throughout the company's service area at the end of the year. They are currently concentrating on opening stores in Montgomery, Macomb, Bond, Macon, Madison and St. Clair counties.

Graduates give selves helping hand

By KEN DICKSON
-Herald Staff Writer

DECATUR. — The need for assistance with a power bill has led to a new career and outlook for Christine Currie.

Currie, 27, of Decatur began taking an adult education course at the Decatur Area Vocational Center because she enrolled in the Hands Up program to get assistance for a bill. She was required to take a course to obtain a new job skill.

The mother of four and eight other classmates, who each joined for their own reason, graduated Thursday from the housekeeping and janitorial service program.

The pilot class, which met 12 times for four hours each day, awards certificates to its graduates.

Three of the graduates already have jobs. Currie starts today as a housekeep-

er for the Decatur Public Building Commission.

"The class helped because we not only learned about cleaning and chemicals and things like that, but we worked on resumes," she said.

Decatur city councilwoman Betsy Stockard teaches the class.

A second class begins with orientation at 9 a.m. today. The first meeting for that class is at 1 p.m. Monday, and it will meet from 1 to 5 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. A third session will run from June 5-26.

Jessie M. Griffin, 44, of Decatur is a certified personal caregiver, but she took the housekeeping-janitorial class to broaden her skills.

"I'm going to go on and get my GED and then go for a teachers aide certificate," she said.

Decatur Mayor Terry Howley attended the short ceremony.

"You have made a definite change in your lives," Howley said. "You have become more independent and self-sufficient. You are role models."

Currie said she went into the program because she had to, but she realized she liked it. Now, she plans to take the basic nursing, welding and introduction to keyboarding classes — more of the adult education offerings.

"They're free, and I think it will lead to bigger and better things," she said. "It will give me a lot of options."

For more information about the DAVC adult education programs, call Rocki Wilkerson at 424-3074.

Ken Dickson can be reached at kdickson@herald-review.com or at 421-7984.

Program offers participants 'A Hand Up'

Several Illinois utilities help customers who have trouble paying their bills

By CLARE HOWARD

of the Journal Star

PEORIA — A new heating assistance program is drawing widespread support throughout Illinois and widespread attention throughout the nation. Central Illinois Light Co. is an enthusiastic participant.

"It's an amazing program. It gives me goose bumps," said CILCO credit analyst Leah Albritton.

"This is a win-win for everyone. This program helps customers pay their bills, it helps communities, and it helps (social service) agencies," said a spokeswoman for Illinois Power.

"This program gave me the confidence I needed," said one participant.

"This program was my dream," said the founder.

"A Hand Up" program is more empowerment than handout. It deals with the problems of customers going from one agency to another every month for assistance with utility bills. It deals with customers who have recurring problems every year.

A consortium of Illinois utilities participate in "A Hand Up." The program helped CILCO cut its gross write-off for nonpayment bad debt from \$3.5 million in 2000 to a net write-off of \$2 million, said Neal Johnson, CILCO spokesman.

"A Hand Up" was the brainchild of Sharon Durbin, a customer service representative at Illinois Power who has worked with nonpaying customers for more than two decades. Durbin, now executive director of "A Hand Up," conceived of a solution to chronic nonpayment in 1991 and started the program in 1997.

■ **Speaker Michael Madigan says the Illinois House will vote on a bill today to expand the number of low-income people who qualify for state assistance with their home heating bills. B3**

As deregulation approached, Durbin saw the problem of nonpaying customers jumping from energy broker to energy broker, much as they had gone from agency to agency for assistance with heating bills.

The program gives assistance with energy bills in exchange for volunteer work at a social service agency or work on a GED degree. Attending GED classes earns participants \$10 an hour to apply to their utility bill. The program also makes referrals for full-

Please see **HAND**, Page B6

HAND

time jobs.

Durbin said the first person in the program had been on federal assistance most of his life. He was able to get a full-time job through the program and told her, "I'd forgotten what it felt like to go to bed at night tired from a day of work and to wake up in the morning with a purpose."

"I'd forgotten what it felt like to go to bed at night tired from a day of work and to wake up in the morning with a purpose."

Sharon Durbin, Illinois Power customer service representative

This winter is CILCO's first full year of participation after a test year.

The Illinois Department of Community Affairs recently awarded a \$2.2 million grant to "A Hand Up." Participating utilities make annual contributions ranging from

\$10,000 to \$200,000 through a 40-cent tax per account per month.

Last year, 2,500 utility customers in Illinois participated in "A Hand Up." This year, participation is expected to exceed 4,000 customers.

CILCO expects to recoup its cost through payment of delinquent accounts and declining numbers of chronic nonpaying customers.

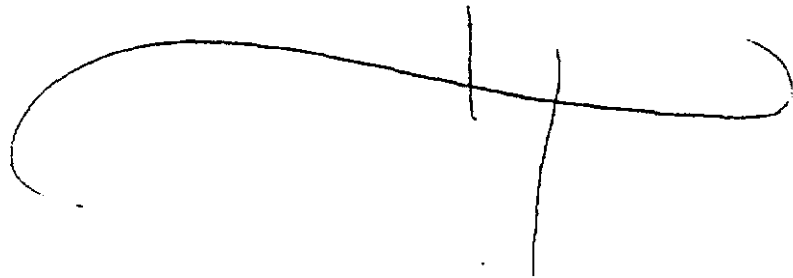
"It is our responsibility to stockholders to work with customers to recover those losses," Johnson said.

For an average cost of about \$85 a year, the program assists with heating bills, budgeting and, ultimately, finding

Dear Hands Up,

I am truly grateful for
the help that you've given me & my
family. What better Xmas gift to
receive, light & gas. Thanks again
for helping the needy, because we do
try. May God Bless

Ms. Belle





Transitional Initiatives and Men's Emergency Services

(217) 398-7785 (Voice)

(217) 398-7787 (Fax)

(217) 239-4637 (Volunteer Hotline)

December 13, 2000

A Hand Up
Attn: Mr. Don Chenoweth
125 East University Ave
Champaign, IL 61820

Dear Mr. Don Chenoweth:

I am writing you to thank you for sending wonderful help to the TIMES Center through A Hand Up program. Many of the participants in your program went above and beyond the duties of a regular volunteer, both at the TIMES Center and at one of our special events.

I like to refer to a few of the participants in your program as "cleaning machines". Ann Still, Jeraldine Hammock, and Corean Eiam keep the TIMES Center spotless, which is almost an unattainable task at a homeless shelter. They are constantly busy looking for something more to help out with. The TIMES Center would not be as clean and organized without the help of participants in your program.

Three other volunteers (Mae Davis, Sandra Washington, and Uhura Graham) were indispensable at our first annual "C-U Helping Hands Day". They took toiletry donations at Jerry's IGA for various social service agencies in town. With very little guidance they made the day run smoothly. Sandra and Uhura even got a chance to be on the Channel 15 News, and presented themselves impeccably.

Once again, thank you for sending such wonderful help to the TIMES Center. Your program benefits everyone involved. I look forward to meeting many more of your helpful participants.

Best wishes this holiday season!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allison E. Kuhne".

Allison E. Kuhne
TIMES Center
Volunteer/Resource Specialist

70 E. Washington St
Champaign, IL 61820

12/13/00

To Whom It May Concern:

I want to thank the "Lands Up Program" for the opportunity to be able to work to get my power bill paid. If it hadn't been for them, I don't know what I would have done. Everyone in the program are really nice to help me. I want to thank Sandy ^{St. James} Scott Sandy Parker & everyone @ Catholic Charities for helping me. I hope the program gets to continue helping people in need.

Sincerely,
Betty J. Turner



The Associated Press

Rebecca Smith sorts clothes as part of her job at the Water Street Mission thrift shop in Decatur, Illinois. Power Co. allows customers, such as Smith, to pay off their utility bills by working at the store.

Thrift store jobs help needy pay delinquent electric bills

■ Illinois Power customers: The program allows the poor to earn \$10 an hour by working the stores; the money goes directly to the utility.

The Associated Press

DECATUR — Rebecca Smith trusted her daughter to pay their power bills.

Instead, she ended up in a dark house owing \$1,209 to Illinois Power and paralyzed with fear about how she would ever pay it off.

Smith started to dig herself out of that debt last week — by working three days a week at the Water Street Mission thrift shop in a program sponsored by Illinois Power.

Smith earns \$10 an hour, but all the money goes directly toward her utility bill. She can shave up to \$600 off the bill that way.

"I think people like me will benefit from this program. I'm chipping away at that bill," said Smith, straightening clothes on hangers and propping up stuffed animals as she talked. "It's a blessing."

The program was the brainchild of Sharon Durbin, who worked for 20 years in Illinois Power's customer service department.

She found herself frustrated with the limited options available as she worked with low-

income customers seeking to get their delinquent bills paid off and their power turned back on.

Many customers worked out payment agreements with the utility, only to default a couple of months later when they couldn't — or wouldn't — pay, Durbin said. Plus, government funding and church donations to help the poor pay their utility bills were decreasing.

Five years ago, Durbin teamed with a number of churches in Montgomery County to sponsor one family who had owed Illinois Power \$2,000 for more than six years and whose power was regularly shut off each summer.

The family helped clean out and restore an old store in order to pay off that bill. Two weeks later, the father was back in Durbin's office, thanking her for giving him the confidence to join the work force.

"He said 'I pounded the pavement and I got a job.' That's been over five years ago and he's still employed and they are completely off welfare," Durbin said. "I saw a whole turning around of a life there. That's what started me pushing to make this program go outside of just one little area."

In January, Illinois Power and a nonprofit group it sponsors called A Hand Up Inc., opened The Unique Boutique thrift store in Collinsville, aided by a \$250,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce.

The Decatur store, already an established thrift shop, began hiring employees wanting to work off their Illinois Power bills last week.

Durbin's goal by the end of year is to have the program established throughout Illinois Power's service area. She's concentrating on opening stores in Montgomery, Macoupin, Bond, Macon, Madison and St. Clair counties.

She believes the program could be used by low-income residents to pay off old rent bills or other delinquent utility expenses. Some workers at the Collinsville store are there as a condition of receiving their welfare checks.

The program is obviously beneficial for Illinois Power because it gets customers to pay their bills, and it helps the company participate in the nationwide welfare-to-work movement, Durbin said.

But she said it's also great for participants — especially ones who may have been out of work for years — because it provides them with confidence, job skills and a reference for future employment.

"I find the great thing in this world is not
So much where we stand;
As in what direction we are moving."

--Oliver Wendell Homes Sr.

Opportunities
come
to those
who set out
to meet them